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Union National Fast Day Sermon.

BY

REV. T. P. BUCHER, A. M.

UNION

NATIONAL FAST DAY

SERMON,

DELIVERED IN THE

UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

GETTYSBURG, PA.,

FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, A. D. 1861.

BY

REV. T. P. BUCHER, A. M.,
PASTOR OF THE GERMAN REFORMED CONGREGATION.

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Gettysburg, Jan. 11, 1861.

Rev. T. P. Bucher:

Dear Sir: We, the undernamed citizens, respectfully request for publication, a copy of the Sermon delivered by you on the 4th of Jan. inst., on the occasion of the observance of the day appointed by the Chief Magistrate for National Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer.

By acceding to our request, you will oblige

Your friends, &c.

S. S. FORNEY,
ROBERT G. HARPER,
WM. McCLEAN,
GEORGE SWOPE,
DAVID WILLS,
W. A. DUNCAN.

Gettysburg, Jan. 17, 1861.

Friends:

Calling to mind the various creeds, parties and interests you represent, I yield my manuscripts for publication.

Yours Truly,

T. P. BUCHER.

Messrs. Forney,
Harper,
McClean,
Swope,
Wills,
Duncan.

SERMON.

TEXT: "Howbeit, this kind goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting."—Matt. XVII: 21.

MEN AND BRETHREN:

THIS is a very solemn occasion which brings us of various creeds and parties together in this holy temple.

God the Father Almighty is to be worshipped through Jesus Christ his Son our Lord, in beseeming devotions, in view of the troubled and threatening aspect of our national affairs.

An inward consciousness guided by the teachings of Holy Writ has brought us, as a people, to make humble recognition of the Divine Sovereignty, that the Lord, who is God, visits individuals and nations with His just judgments for their sins; that to those who fear His name, He is both merciful and good.

And from thousands of christian altars, when Sabbath worship fills the Sanctuary, prayers have been ascending to God, and daily prayers from millions of pious hearts, in behalf of our Country in this hour of her extremity.

But as a nation we are dismayed; as *a nation* then we must acknowledge our sins, and by *fasting and prayer* sue for pardon, and that direction which will bring deliverance from present dangers. Such humblings under the mighty hand of God and such pleadings are suggested not only by the biblical page, but also by incidents in our own past history.

During the revolutionary struggle when hope seemed to fail, and unnerving destitution stared the soldiery, the Revolutionary Congress appointed a season to be observed in fasting and prayer.

The Convention, which had met to frame a Constitution for the United States, in the midst of its labors came to a dead stand. This cessation in business threatened disruption, when Franklin proposed that there be an adjournment for prayer and friendly conference, and that, hereafter, the Convention be opened each day with an address to the Throne of Grace for wisdom and direction in the duties before it. The motion prevailed unanimously, and to that eminently prudent suggestion we know not how far we are indebted for that noble compact which has bound the States together in peace and prosperity for nearly four score years.

Then, in this present gloomy state of the nation, when political madness seems to prevail, and so few Statesmen effort to pour oil on the boiling deep, when all human wisdom is at fault, when our counsellors err from the chiefest down, when hope almost has

deserted the minds of men, it is very proper, yea, and grateful to those who love their country, who love the union for the sake of what has been achieved under it in the past, and the high hopes of the future — that a *day* has been set apart *for humiliation, fasting and prayer* by the *President*, that we, in our national capacity, may flee to Jehovah, our only hope and refuge, "a very present help in time of trouble."

Our devotions therefore assume this serious, and heart-throbbing character. I tremble in view of my position, in view of the delicacy and responsibility of the pulpit. I assure you it has not been coveted.

The force of circumstances, and the illness of several of my ministerial brethren have constrained me to speak to my countrymen and for my country in this solemn place. To-day, who would stand between God and man should be an Eli of long experience before the altar, and not a youthful Samuel. To-day is needed sober thoughtfulness, calm judgment, and grave christian counsel. Men of impassioned minds and feelings are demanded. And now, where do we turn for these, but to grey heads who can look serenely over the boisterous sea of our troubles, discerning the lowering storm, and who, in the might and wisdom of their age, can lead most reverently our worship to Him whose favor, when secured, will temper judgment with mercy.

But in our capacity to-day we are also *pares inter pares.* We are all mutually interested, and equally responsible. A weighty duty presses upon every good citizen and Christian patriot of our land. For each must feel that never in the history of our confederacy was the help of God more needed, never was there such occasion for humiliation, *for fasting*, FOR PRAYER, that He, who alone is mighty, would rebuke the evils which disturb our body politic, and come, and bless us.

The history of our text, selected from the words of the Lord Jesus, is briefly a narrative of the miracle performed by him, when he rebuked a devil that had possessed a youth of Galilee. The lad had first been brought to the disciples by his father, but the case was such an aggravated one, and the faith of both parties so wavering, that they could not cure him. After the miracle by the Great Master, the disciples came inquiring of him why they could not cast out the evil spirit, when the pith of the reply was, "this kind goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting."

In the application of these words to our present circumstances we are led to remark :

I. UPON THE AGGRAVATED EVILS WHICH HAVE BECOME INCORPORATE IN OUR BODY POLITIC, AND NOW DISTRESS US; and that

II. HUMILIATION, FASTING AND PRAYER ARE MEANS FOR THEIR REMOVAL. In other words, *if our abase-*

ment be sincere, if our repentance be whole, God will send us relief from the afflictions which our sins have brought, and give peace and prosperity to all our borders.

There can be no questioning the propriety of setting forth the causes of our present distress, if the end aimed at be proper. That humiliation which is deepest, and which the wonder-working God will have respect to, comes from a clear consciousness of guilt. Then let us advert to THE EVILS, evil spirits they should be called, which afflict our body politic. These are

SUPREME DEVOTION TO MATERIAL INTERESTS.

This is one of the leading sins of the American people. If we lift up the curtain that veils the motives of men in any of the professions and trades, in all the walks of life, the over-ruling propensity discovered will be this—an excessive, unremitting devotion to mammon, and other material interests. It amounts to idolatry. The worshippers exhibit the greatest ardency. They brave all sorts of dangers. They risk life, health and happiness. No difficulties are insurmountable. Every possible sacrifice is made, if it will further success, if it will only conduct along the golden avenues to the palace where their El Dorado is enshrined. Corporations are frequently formed of the most heterogeneous elements, with no bond of sympathy but that of worldly

interest. Utilitarianism invests everything. Almost every project, every enterprise, moral, social, political or religious, is subjected to the test question, "Will it pay?" Not whether it will improve society, advance the arts of peace, and build up the tranquil reign of righteousness, but whether it will pay. Indeed it has come to this, that the lust for gain prevails over almost every noble impulse; it ignores the high and holy interests of humanity, and the honor of God; and in this hour of danger, restrains the ardor of that patriotism necessary to the preservation of our common country. Have you not heard of the calculations made of the material value of the Union? The South has spoken out, "We'll make money by disunion, and the establishment of independent sovereignties, and the North saying "Let these cotton States secede, the government will save millions by their withdrawal." Money has become the paramount interest which subordinates our love of country, the rights and privileges enjoyed under the constitution, the progress of good government, and the influence which a united, free and virtuous people must exert upon the nations of the earth; yea, completely subordinates them all to the supremacy of mere material interests.

This explains the sordid selfishness underlying the expressions reverberating not in our quiet vales and hamlets, but in the halls of Congress, even: Cotton is King! Commerce is King! Corn is King! Rice is

King! Iron is King! consummated in the dynasty to which all belong, Money is King!! Yea, as if it were to follow: *Mammon is King* and GOD his SUBJECT.

Very true, that a high degree of energy in the acquisition of wealth is not incompatible with the true progress of a nation. Laziness can never be approbated, nor indolence reckoned one of the virtues. By no means. Schemes of accumulating fortunes, efforts and enterprises necessary to break our prairies, and cut down our forests, to explore our mines, and develop our national resources, are not to be exchanged for beds of ease, nor for masterly inactivity. But what I mean to say, is, that our *supreme* devotion to material interests is wrong; that it prostitutes mind and heart, our moral and physical powers to objects beneath those to which we may nominally aspire; that it tends to blunt the finer sensibilities of the soul, to weaken the restraints of conscience, to destroy the might of motives to intellectual and moral attainments, defeating thereby the high purpose for which God has raised us up as a nation; that it strengthens the baser passions of man's nature so as to render it possible, yea, probable, that it is such a dangerous evil proclivity in our national life as eventually to undermine the whole fabric of our institutions, and cause this last experiment of a free government to fall by its own covetousness and luxury, like some noted republics of old.

Such is one of the first and leading evils to be bewailed by our afflicted nation at this time. It militates against her internal harmony, and checks her wonted progress and true greatness.

EXCESSIVE PARTY SPIRIT.

In a government like ours Party Spirit in a temperate form is of great practical importance. It not only contributes to watchfulness on the part of those who may be intrusted with the affairs of the nation, but urges the adoption of such measures as will advance the public good. Where the people are sovereign, there is continual need of interest and reflection on questions affecting the common weal. Parties promote these by their rival policies; they tend to stir up the popular mind, to increase intelligence and give energy to the administration of government. But Party Spirit when excessive, when it exists to the extent it does amongst us, is rather a *curse* than a blessing. Facts bear out this strong assertion.

1. Political partisans hate each other.

a. They disregard the obligations due to each other as fellow-citizens.

b. They depreciate rights and opinions entitled to equal weight with their own.

c. They assail each others' character to an unwarranted degree and bemean themselves before God and man.

2. Is not our party spirit entirely *too proscriptive* for the general good? *a.*)When a man's business suffers and his patronage decreases: *b.*) When his character as a citizen and his religious standing are at a discount, simply by belonging to an opposite party: is there not then a tendency current which must disturb the order of things, embitter social relations, and undermine the interests of both church and State? A spirit, by the way, altogether inconsistent with personal freedom, and sadly destructive, in the end, of our boasted national liberty.

Look at Party Spirit breathing out through the press of the land! What is its character and bearing? It stoops to conquer. With noble exceptions, it is often characterized by a malignant and unhallowed spirit of personal abuse. Public men and candidates for public station are subject to the severest animadversions. Every little foible in a man's character is magnified into a most serious defect. This cannot help but weigh with men of modest worth, deterring them from entering the lists for office; whilst it elevates obscure men of mediocre talents and fitness to responsible positions, to become our law-makers and guardians in State and National councils. This is a very sore evil—felt to-day—patent this hour in the halls of Congress.

But the immoral character of the partisan press lies not entirely in its too often low vulgarity and unworthy detraction. When it rises into earnest

discussion of political questions it is bitter, vindictive and uncompromising in the extreme. It knows no higher aim than party, and with its potent influence resists the true progress of the nation. Why? Because its motive is self and party aggrandizement. This is the pent-up Utica within which it dwells, and which hinders any far sweeping view of the sublime interests of the race and nation. Except in a few instances it is controlled by no christian mind and has no christian heart pulsating through its opinions. It repudiates anything like deference for religion and man's high destiny. Yea, it looks contemptuously upon the church of Jesus Christ, for the reason that *it* will not prostitute its more comprehensive mission to the constrained level of becoming an abettor of the particular *ism* of this, or that political journal.

Look again at party spirit finding its way out through the pulpits of the land, of New England mostly. There are preachers of politics as well as of the gospel. There are those who are not satisfied with proclaiming the written scripture, in its own gentle, all persuasive mission, but who go out of the Bible, into the sphere of politics, for themes; who make their pulpits the place to echo their partisan predilections as well as their evangel of love and mercy to a perishing world, caught up from the book of inspiration. This sensational-political preaching may attract crowds and sell pews, but it may also mar the peace of Zion, and injure the cause of Christ.

Great and good men of all creeds and parties are beginning to look upon this as wholesale pulpit desecration and very mischeivous, and as retarding the true interests of man.

SECTIONAL HATRED.

This is now the dark cloud o'erhanging our borders, brooding secession and disunion. How portentously black and appalling! See ye any traces of a silver lining? Truly, it becomes every man who loves the land of his birth, and his race, to dwell with the deepest solicitude upon this most fearful evil of all with which we are threatened. The spirit of sectionalism was born in our country years ago. But there have always been conservative men enough to crush its risings before it come to be so fearful an evil as it now appears both North and South.

"Our fathers when they devised measures for promoting their country's welfare had reference to every section. They wished to be just to each and to all. It was literally true of them that they knew no North, no South, no East, no West. They did not interfere with the particular institutions of any part of the Union. They did not indulge in invective language that was only calculated to embitter one portion of the Union against the other. Their object was to bind together in indissoluble bonds their entire country. They knew that every part

was dependent on the other, and that each was derived from the union of all."

Having done their part faithfully and in the spirit of mutual concession and brotherly love, they hoped to bequeath to posterity a precious boon. And the solemn compact of States thus happily wedded together, was not a marriage for a day, but for aye. It was expected to become more vigorous, and more closely inter-united, and, gradually, to approach perfection with the strength of years.

This was the spirit of our fathers. What is the spirit now dwelling in many of their sons? Is it the same loyal devotion to the ideas underlying the constructed government?—To the charity which bound each component part? Does enlightened conservatism prevail now, as then?

This may be the reason. The christian element in civilization has not kept pace with the growth of fanaticism. The former moves in the quiet sphere of sanctified life; the latter appealing to the natural emotions, runs with accelerated speed, until by its vantage it has endangered the perpetuity of our whole fabric by creating the most violent of antagonisms.

But are anti-slavery and pro-slavery so irreconcilable? Must they necessarily array one State against another?—be the bone of contention continually?—and excite sectional hatred? Can it be, that all the precious interests of the Union, political and relig-

ious must be jeopardized by that which our Fathers were entirely silent over? Morally, slavery is not incompatible with christianity, just as little as anti-slavery, politically, must be subversive of equal rights. Christianity* is both slavery and anti-slavery, and yet it is neither. Its mission is broader, higher, holier. How can it be made the hand-maid of sectionalism, when it knows no North, nor South, no East, nor West. Life, *Light*, and Love is the spirit it carries wherever its peaceful sway extends.

On the one hand, it puts forth proper efforts for the oppressed; on the other, it sanctifies the relations of master and slave, making the master humane, and the slave faithful and obedient.† Christianity does not propose any change in the outward relations, in which God has placed man by birth, education, or fortune.‡ It does not encourage dissension and sedition, sectionalism and revolution, but quietly makes better whatever institutions it may find existing among men, until by their *own free will and accord* they prefer, because they are prepared to enjoy, a different order of things. Where, then, is the necessity for this excitement, this bitter vituperation, this unbrotherly hatred, which disturb the peace and harmony of our beloved land, and lead to civil war?

*In this, and several other places, I have taken the privilege of stating the idea intended to be conveyed more definitely, than the hurry of my preparation for the pulpit allowed.

†Eph. 6 : 5—9. ‡1 Tim. 6 : 1—6.

To correct the evils of slavery, preach Christ crucified, "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." For, where Christ is all and in all, there will be "neither Jew nor Greek, *bond nor free*, male, nor female." To restrain the aggressive spirit of anti-slavery, let evangelical piety temper both presses and societies with the charity of the Gospel. If the power of a *positive Christianity* could prevail, it would be like oil on the troubled waters. Then the hearts and minds of the people would be filled with the mind that was in Christ; then would they be as *one*. Crimination and recrimination would cease, and the spirit of mutual forbearance and brotherly kindness would soon adjust the difficulties which now impede our prosperity, as well as disturb our peace.

Sectionalism has reigned long enough. It has divided churches—destroyed the peace and unity of families—embarrassed all kinds of business—distracted the whole country. See what we, as a nation, have already lost by it; and think of the religious interests of millions of the race of man that may yet be jeopardized by it. In connection with this, look at the picture of a dismembered confederacy, where civil war reigns, and brethren of a once happy land have taken arms to fight against their kindred with the fury of demons! Think of the houses made desolate; of the widows and orphans left in grief! Think of the anarchy that would de-

luge our fertile vallies with fraternal blood! Think of every possible interest, whether of a civil, or religious kind, completely prostrated; and of the contemned God of Heaven laughing at our calamity!

The heart of the true patriot, already faint, sickens at the thought; and all the work of this evil spirit of sectionalism. For our country's sake, for humanity's sake, let us bury our differences, and humble ourselves at the foot of the Cross. Let us plead for mercy and peace of Him, who can bring order out of confusion, before that disastrous day come, when it shall lay our hopes in the loathsome dust, and write ICHABOD on the walls of our skies.

IRRELIGIOUS, OR UNCHRISTIAN ELEMENT.

This is one of the deplorable evils in respect to which some leading points only can be mentioned.

Is there irreligion in politics? Does an unchristian element show itself to any alarming extent? Solemn questions to the American citizen! Let us attempt their consideration. *Politics*, in a general way, is so corrupt, that good men are advised to keep out of it. Unless, when you are in Rome, you can do as Rome does, 'twere better not to aspire to political preferment. In order to get the nomination, and then the political office, a man is compelled to compromise his christian standing. He *must* do it either directly, or be in complicity with those, who

have few conscientious scruples to respect, if he wishes to succeed. And then, when the post is gained, the immoralities of our public men embarrass him, and modify his sentiments at every point. As much as possible, if he is decidedly pious, he must be kept out of party organization, and repelled from such places of trust where his sway would be felt, because religious and conscientious scruples are at variance with the general irreligion of political life, and distasteful to corrupt public men.

The neutrality of politicians and statesmen with respect to religion in its proper sense is obvious. They do not wish, even if they feel it to be right and duty, to identify themselves with any thoroughly Christian denomination. It is said, that our Chief Executive, the President, keeps aloof from formal church-membership until he retires from office. Though he, of all other men, needs the grace of God in the discharge of his high duties and trusts, yet he must forego this, as it is enjoyed in the church by the humblest citizen. Biblical principles underlie the structure of government, yet it is considered improper to recognize the fact, or those administrating it, that they should be religious! The State Constitutions of Missouri and Texas contain clauses hostile to Christianity;* only those of North Carolina and New Jersey recognize the christian faith, and are formed after the model of Christian States. As

*Dr. McIlvaine on a "Nation's Right to Worship God."

a nation, we do not acknowledge Jesus Christ to be king. Look at our State and National Thanksgiving and Fast proclamations, how carefully, they refrain from giving honor to Christ. His name is not only omitted, but the least reference to his mediatorship is avoided. To all intents and purposes, therefore, are not these infidel papers? Omit the name of Christ because Jew, or Mahommedan, or infidel objects? Surely we are more a Christian nation than Jew or infidel? Here then we may sin grievously in not rendering faithful and sincere homage to Christ, respecting the opinions of men more than the plain dictates of right, and teachings of truth.

There may be some offsets to these statements found in the *liberal policy* of our government, but then, at this juncture, and in view of the design of this day's devotions, it is well, if we would be upright and sincere, to acknowledge the plain facts set forth.

Infidelity, already wide-spread, is extending itself more and more, and silently poisoning the pure morality of the Bible to which it is opposed. This is done under the garb of philanthropy and would-be reforms. There are scores of these reform publications, and thousands of these philanthropists penetrating every nook and corner of our *social relations*, and diffusing their infidel principles, by projecting modes of living, etc., conducive to the temporal welfare of human life, which in every way ignore

any reference to man's eternal destiny. In this way the various schemes of the socialists, *et id genus omne*, are industriously propagated. See how old established theories of government are repudiated! At the late Puritan Festival in Philadelphia on Forefathers' day, an eloquent orator* spoke these words amid applause: "Men need governments of restraint only as they are not developed, and not free. As the individual becomes strong in his whole nature he needs no government, the human soul is competent to entire sovereignty." These statements are put forth as the cardinal doctrines of Puritan Ethics and Puritan Politics. Their teaching is simply to leave each man to do that which is right in his own eyes. Now is this biblical? Is it not blasphemy? Arrogating to poor sinful humanity that to which the angels in heaven dare not aspire!

There is irreligion also in our *moral relations*. That creed is prevailing everywhere, that "a man's moral character does not constitute the basis on which his external destiny is decided—that all are rewarded alike—that the laws of God and man may be violated with impunity." According to this theory either there is no future state at all, or else it is one of felicity for all. Religion is merely negative, if there be any such state of moral relation. Such is its monstrous doctrine! It is nothing for the soul's enjoyment, or the life's peace, or death's hope. No,

*Rev. Henry Ward Beecher.

none of this. And these irreligious theories are flowing like streams all over our land, blighting its fairest prospects, and undermining the very foundations of our moral relations and ultimate greatness. Many, many are decoyed, and unhinged as to their true interests, who might be numbered among the virtuous and the good, the noblest of our enlightened country.

OTHER EVILS.

How can we close our eyes to the growing evils of Sabbath-breaking, Intemperance and Gambling? Look at the myriads of Sunday desecrators and their forwardness! Look at the tens of thousands of *victims of Intemperance* annually going to ruin! Look at the rapidly increasing number of *political, social and private gamblers*, who reap treasures at the expense of those who make no pretensions to control the stocks, who stuff the ballot boxes, or who are in league with the conscienceless proprietors of the faro.

There is also the *evil spirit of pride.* This is named last, but it is by no means the least. We lack not in those who will extravagantly glorify their country, and boast in startling impiety of our institutions; nor in those who glorify themselves—Herod-like—as if there were no Supreme One to whom all homage must be paid.

These, my brethren, are some of the sins which characterize our people, and are, per consequence,

reigning in our national life, in our body politic, like the evil one prevailed in the youth of Galilee. Are they not of an aggravated character? Our country too is *but young*, yet these are her sore afflictions which disturb and distress her, prostrating her, as it were, to the ground, and tearing her in every joint and member.

OUR DUTY.

To whom now shall we look for relief? Who is able to rebuke the evils which threaten her destruction, who to restore her to health, activity and prosperity again?

To men! No, the exigency is too great for human help. The crisis which has come upon us like a thunder-clap in a clear sky has confused and turned the counsels of men to naught. Without divine interposition we have but little hope. This our calamity can only be averted by

HUMILIATION, FASTING AND PRAYER.

If we humble ourselves in deep contrition. If we, by fasting and prayer, implore the Divine help—He may have compassion upon us and come to our relief. If we acknowledge the justness of our punishment for past sins and heartily forsake them—He will exalt us to our wonted position. If this nation, like Nineveh of old, clothes, itself in the sackcloth of repentance, we need have no fear but

that God will remove our affliction, and bid peace and happiness smile upon our borders.

By fasting and prayer the whole heart of the nation may be turned to God in sincere trust and confidence. These, verily, may be the two wings of her repenting soul, by the help of which she may ascend to Heaven and secure the peace of God. This is what we so much need, the favor of Almigthy God. His peace is our peace. Enjoying it, we will forget past differences, rise above that which now distracts and divides, leaving what evils we lament to be overthrown by Jehovah, and what justice we wish to see prevailing, firmly established by his powerful hand. By it we will be filled with the one spirit of his charity, and be united in the mission of freedom and righteousness to the nations of earth.

May our abasement to-day be of that sincere and whole kind which is the forerunner of our exaltation! May it move Him who holds the destinies of nations in his hands, to bring speedy relief, and before many more bright suns may blush at our confusion, permit us to witness the return of peace and good will, of order, harmony and prosperity rising and reigning from Maine to California, from the Lakes to the Gulfs, in the beautiful resplendency of their counterparts of plenty, happiness and true greatness.

And, as we compass God's holy altar at this time, and in the exercises of this evening,* let it be our

*The Union Meeting of Prayer for our Country was held in the evening in the German Reformed Church.

sincere purpose to look away from ourselves—from our sins—from the material interests to which we have been so supremely devoted, and from partisan politics, which seems to have subordinated our love of country to the love of party: let us cease magnifying the differences between ourselves, and our brethren of any other section: let it be foremost in our minds to repudiate the irreligion of our day, and nation, and to honor and acknowledge Jesus Christ to be KING OF NATIONS, as well as *King of Saints:* Yea, and as forming part of the great assembly of the millions of our countrymen congregated to-day within the various churches of the land, let us be moved in deep earnestness, and with unfeigned lips, to worship Him, *as the Lord*, OUR GOD; that it may please Him to cause His face to shine upon us, and to UNITE US in the *fulfillment of the great purpose for which He has raised us up as a nation!*

Let our prayer be

"Oh Lord! Look down upon our land thou hast loved so well,
And grant that in unbroken peace, her children still may dwell.
* * * * * * * *
Oh Lord, keep her penitent, grateful, the happiest 'neath the sun,
Our *Country*, our WHOLE COUNTRY, and our COUNTRY ONE."

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